

This Thing Called Freedom

By Premier T. C. Douglas

(From a Radio Speech Delivered Wednesday, March 10, 1943)

We hear a great deal these days about the need for preserving our freedom and defending our way of life. Almost every week organizations like the National Chamber of Commerce and the Bankers' Association distribute thousands of pamphlets and insert advertisements in our newspapers warning us that our freedom is being threatened by what they call "planners"—those who want state control. It might be well, therefore, to ask ourselves a few pertinent questions: What do they mean by freedom? Whose freedom are these organizations concerned about—ours or theirs? Are they really anxious to preserve our freedom or have they some ulterior motive for carrying on their elaborate and expensive publicity campaign?

Let us ask ourselves what we mean when we talk about this thing called freedom. Well, I think we would all agree that we mean freedom from irresponsible tyranny. That is, we demand the right to freely elect those who make our laws, and we want the right to dismiss governments when they no longer serve us well. We want freedom from injustice, so that no one can be imprisoned without a fair and proper trial, whether he be rich or poor. We want freedom of speech and freedom of the press and, basic to all of these, we demand the right to worship our Creator in whatever manner our convictions dictate.

The Czechs Know

These are the basic freedoms which we are fortunate enough to enjoy in this country. We did not always have them. Brave men and women fought and died for these freedoms, and we are unworthy of our forefathers unless we strive to preserve them with might and main. All parts of the world are not as fortunate in this regard as we are. A few days ago the free people of Czechoslovakia lost some of these freedoms. Every person who loves democracy must feel a great sorrow that the people of this gallant little democracy have once more come under the heavy hand of a totalitarian regime. It has been said that eternal vigilance is the price of liberty, and we must ever be on guard to defend the liberties we have, and that means not only safeguarding our own rights but the rights

of all our citizens, whether they be Japanese or Negroes or Indians—or the neighbor who lives next door.

However, freedom means much more than the right to vote and speak as we like and the right to a fair trial in the courts. These are freedoms which we have already won, and while we must preserve them, we must not stop there. There is still another freedom to be won, and that is economic freedom, or as President Roosevelt defined it, "freedom from fear and freedom from want." Political freedom by itself can mean being free to go hungry and without a job; it can mean being free to produce farm commodities below the cost of production. Until we add economic freedom to the political freedom we already have, we will never be entirely free men and women.

This Freedom, Too

After all, what freedom have the men who go down into the mines before the sun rises; who toil in the bowels of the earth all day in order that others may enjoy the fruits of their labor? What do these men know of economic freedom? Someone else controls the means by which they live; all they have to sell is their labor, and they must sell that on someone else's terms. That is why trade unions came into existence—because the worker sought to have some say regarding his wages, hours and conditions of labor.

What freedom have the farmers who work in all kinds and conditions of weather, only to find that someone else sets the price of their gasoline and their farm machinery? What freedom has the man who sold his coarse grains last October, only to find that the price has gone up 30 or 40 cents a bushel since he disposed of his crop? What about the farmer who sold his livestock last fall to the packing companies and then sees the latter get all the benefit of the increase in price? A writer in Maclean's Magazine pointed out a few weeks ago that the packing companies had in cold storage 30,000,000 pounds more than the previous year. When the price went up their stock went up \$9,000,000 in value.

What freedom has the consumer, who must pay whatever price is demanded by those who control our economy? The same writer in Maclean's pointed out that it takes three weeks from the time a hog is delivered to the packing plant until it appears in the butcher shop—yet within two or three days of the price ceiling being lifted meat had gone up from five to 20 cents a pound.

Ownership Important

That is why the C.C.F. maintain that in order to have economic freedom we must have social ownership of the economic means by which we live. Social ownership simply means ownership by the people. This does not mean the abolition of private ownership. Land, for instance, in this country is still in the hands of the people who till the soil. That is

why the C.C.F. is opposed to the socialization of land because the people still control that important natural resource. In the same way, small businesses are still in the hands of individuals, and there is sufficient competition to ensure ample protection to the public. But, wherever the principal assets of our country are in the hands of monopolies and cartels, we believe they should be owned by the people themselves. We believe that when any economic activity controls the life of a people it should be owned by the people.

It is at this point that our opponents say that your freedom is at stake. Doesn't that seem strange reasoning to you? If one man owns an industry and hires 10,000 men to work for him the Chamber of Commerce would call that democracy. But if the 10,000 men organize so as to own the plant and work for themselves the free enterprisers would call that dictatorship. I believe just the opposite. I contend that if a group of men sitting on the grain exchange owned all the grain handling facilities, so that they had the farmers at their mercy, then that would be economic slavery. But, if the farmers banded themselves to own their own grain handling facilities, that would be economic freedom.

Is This Slavery?

Our opponents seem to argue that if the people own and control their economy we would lose our freedom. Well, let's examine that. Do you feel less free because the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation is owned by all of us who are Canadian citizens than you would if some private monopoly controlled the airways? Do you feel less free when you ride on the C.N.R. or the T.C.A., or when you stay in the Bessborough Hotel, because these are socially owned? When you travel in a Saskatchewan bus you are patronizing an enterprise owned by all the people of Saskatchewan. Would you feel less regimented if it were operated by a board of directors located in Chicago?

The people of Regina, Saskatoon and Weyburn, to mention only a few, own their own electric power facilities; do you think these citizens have lost their freedom? On the contrary, they feel that they have achieved a measure of economic freedom because they own and operate these utilities for the public good.

Capitalists Plan, Too

The defenders of capitalism argue that social ownership means that we will all be dictated to by planners. Don't you think that the capitalists have planners, too? Of course they do! They plan how they can get hold of the natural resources of a country and how much they can sell their product for and how little they will have to pay in wages and how much they can take out in profits. In our complex economy we must have planning; the choice we must make is whether that planning will be done by a few corporations responsible to nobody but themselves or whether we are to have planning by those responsible to the electorate.

Therefore, ask yourself the question "Whose freedom are these people concerned about—theirs or mine?" Certainly it is not our political democracy they are worried about. What these groups fear is economic freedom for you and me. They feel that their special privileges are threatened.

They'll Resist

All this is quite understandable. No privileged group ever gives up its right to exploit without a struggle.

The vested interests of this continent are fighting to preserve their freedom—the freedom of a few to exploit the many. We are seeking to establish freedom for all the people that they may enjoy the fruits of their toil and may own and control the economic means by which they live.

When all other alibis are exhausted our opponents always fall back on the argument that social ownership means compulsion. They say you make people do things for their own good—this is an interference with freedom. But isn't that just the difference between a civilized man and a savage? A savage does just whatever he likes, even to killing his neighbor and stealing his wife. But civilized man gives up his right to do anything that will hurt his fellows and agrees to co-operate for the mutual security of his community.

Hundreds of thousands of Canadians pay into the unemployment insurance. They are not asked whether they want to contribute or not—they must do so as a means of providing against a time when they will be out of work. The farmers of Western Canada pay into the P.F.A.A. Nobody asks your permission to deduct one percent from your grain cheque—it is a form of crop insurance. The people of Saskatchewan have to pay a hospital tax—granted it is compulsory, but most people do not consider they have lost their freedom thereby; rather, they believe it is one step toward attaining "freedom from fear" when sickness comes into their home. Social security is itself one of the most important freedoms.

We need never fear compulsion if it is imposed by ourselves so that if we don't like it we can remove it. What we need to fear is the compulsion which is imposed by those over whom we have no control. Nearly a hundred years ago Abraham Lincoln freed the black man from chattel slavery; today we need someone to free the white man from economic slavery.

In all ages men have fought for freedom. But the greatest struggle of all still awaits us—the struggle to be free from exploitation and to have a voice in determining our own economic destiny. To that struggle I invite every man and woman who seeks to see freedom from fear and freedom from want established throughout our land.

Issued by Authority of the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation
(Sask. Section), 510 Kerr Block, Regina, Sask.

 Printed by Service Printers, Regina, Sask.